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The Chesapeake and New England Colonies: A Comparison

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The Chesapeake and New England Colonies: A Comparison

During the late 16th century and into the 17th century, European nations rapidly colonized the newly discovered Americas. England in particular sent out numerous groups to the eastern coast of North America to two regions. These two regions were known as the [Chesapeake](#) and the New England areas. Later, in the late 1700's, these two areas would bond to become one nation. Yet from the very beginnings, both had very separate and unique identities. These differences, though very numerous, spurred from one major factor: the very reason the settlers came to the New World. This affected the colonies in literally every way, including economically, socially, and politically.

The Chesapeake region of the colonies included Virginia, Maryland, the New

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Jerseys (both East and West) and Pennsylvania. In 1607, Jamestown, the first English colony in the New World (that is, the first to thrive and prosper), was founded by a group of 104 settlers to a peninsula along the James River. These settlers hoped to find gold, silver, a northwest passage to Asia, a cure for syphilis, or any other valuables they might take back to Europe and make a profit. Lead by [Captain John Smith](#), who "outmaneuvered other members of the colony's ruling and took ruthlessly took charge" (Liberty Equality Power, p. 57), a few lucky members of the original voyage survived. These survivors turned to the local Powhatan Indians, who taught them the process of corn- and tobacco-growing. These staple-crops flourished throughout all five of these colonies.

New England was north of the Chesapeake, and included Massachusetts Bay Colony, Plymouth, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Haven (which soon became part of Connecticut). The New Englanders were largely Puritan Separatists, who sought religious freedom. When the Church of England separated from Catholicism under Henry VIII, Protestantism flourished in England. Some Protestants, however, wanted complete separation from Catholicism and embraced Calvinism. These "Separatists" as they were called, along with persecuted Catholics who had not joined the Church of England, came to New England in hopes of finding this religious freedom where they would be free to practice as they wished. Their motives were, thus, religious in

nature, not economic. In fact, New England settlers reproduced much of England's economy, with only minor variations. They did not invest largely in staple crops, instead, relied on artisan-industries like carpentry, shipbuilding, and printing.

The Chesapeake and New England attracted different types of settlers and, by 1700, the populations differed enormously. In New England, the population was almost entirely English and white, with the Congregational Church formerly established. Devoutly religious families, including Puritans, Quakers, and Catholics made up a large percentage of the population. It was due to the reputation the [New England colonies](#) had as a place of religious freedom that these people came. In the Chesapeake, however, the population was a majority black-slaves, that is. With the boom in the tobacco industry, plantation owners relied on the cheap labor slaves or indentured servants provided. Slave trade itself became a leading industry. Only because of the economic gold mine in the Chesapeake were slaves brought in, therefore, the economy affected the overall population of the area vastly.

The religion of the two areas differed greatly as well. Because New Englanders came to escape religious persecution, one would think that it would become a land of complete tolerance. This was not the case, though. The New Englanders were very religious-based, and claimed that they "were far more godly than all other colonists" ("American Colonies", p. 3). Religion was family-based and with

extreme piety, There was one clergyman for every 600 people, the highest in the New World. In the Chesapeake, religion was much less severe. The established church was the Anglican Church, but only became so after 1692. The religious tone was low-church, and many people (mostly slaves) did not participate in the Anglican Church.

Yet another major difference caused by the founding purposes was the economy of the two. As mentioned previously, the Chesapeake economy revolved around the tobacco industry, which paved the way for other industries as well. Slave trade relied fully on the tobacco plantation owners as a market to sell the slaves to. In addition, the tobacco raised enough to finance the importation of indentured servants, who would then go to work the tobacco, increasing the production further. It became a cycle, with the result being the ever-increasing production and sale of the tobacco. New England did not "have all of it's eggs in one basket" quite like the Chesapeake. The economy was based on fishing, shipbuilding, and farming. The farming in New England was done on a much smaller scale, however. Because the religion (and society) was so family-oriented, farms were usually just large enough to feed one's family, with a small surplus. It was no where near the size of the vast plantations in the Chesapeake. This was simply because New England's focus was not on economic gain.

Clearly the Chesapeake and the New England regions did differ in numerous

ways. These differences included population, religion, and economy. But also the differences were on a wide-scale range involving almost every aspect of the society, they all sprouted from one initial difference between the two: the very reason the colonists came. It was due to these ideals held by the groups that lead them to create the contrasting societies. Therefore, it cannot be denied as a significant cause of the contrast. As shown, this purpose was carried out in the society. The fortune-seeking economists in the Chesapeake created a society based around this ideal, which affected their entire community. The New Englanders, looking for religious freedom, sought to create a very different society centered around a very different ideal, that of religion, not economic gain. Obviously, then, we can say that it because of these motives that the Chesapeake and the New England regions of the New World became so different by 1700.

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